

# Prison inmate awaits organ transplant

08:45 PM PDT on Friday, April 8, 2005

By CHRIS INGALLS / KING 5 News

SEATTLE - For the first time in Washington state, a prison inmate is on the organ transplant waiting list and taxpayers will pay for the expensive operation.

The state prisoner is in dire need of a liver and an operation that could cost up to \$500,000.

KING 5 Investigators have learned that the inmate is housed at the Monroe Correctional Facility.

The operation will be performed at the University of Washington Medical Center, where the inmate is now on a liver transplant waiting list.

The Department of Corrections medical director, Dr. Marc Stern, is bracing for criticism that a prisoner will receive such a costly operation.

"I would understand that, however we're bound to execute the 8th Amendment as we interpret it and provide basic medical care, and as we see it, this is basic medical care," Stern said.

The operation will cost between \$250,000 to \$500,000. Taxpayers will foot the bill through the prison system's \$80-million health care budget.



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"I think this is just the first patient who's come to our attention who was brought through the process, who we felt met the criteria and brought to the UW and they felt needed to be placed on the list," Stern said.

Citing doctor-patient confidentiality, corrections officials won't divulge details about the prisoner, such as age, the length of sentence or what he's in for.

Controversy has arisen in other states when prisoners get transplants, yet poor, law-abiding citizens can't afford the expensive procedures.

The United Network for Organ Sharing, which matches organs with donors, said it doesn't take an official position on prisoner transplants. It said it has provided organs to prisoners in other states.